

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A messaging system means comprising a plurality of messaging nodes, a plurality of user accounts with distinct messaging address identifiers, and a plurality of portable messaging units including

- a) storage means for firmware for controlling messaging operations;
- b) storage means for the storage of messages;
- c) composition means for the composition of messages;
- d) display means for the display of messages;
- e) associative means for associating at least one of said portable messaging units with at least one of said user accounts, and
- f) communications means for conducting a data exchange with a messaging node, when in an immediate proximity of said messaging node;

whereby a plurality of said portable messaging units may conduct two-way messaging via said messaging system when in said immediate proximity to at least one messaging node of said messaging system, and conduct user interface functions irrespective of location.

2. The means of claim 1, wherein a plurality of said portable messaging units are each capable of conducting said data exchange at a plurality of said messaging nodes.

3. The means of claim 1, wherein a plurality of said messaging nodes include a plurality of docking ports each accepting portable messaging units.

4. The means of claim 1, wherein said messaging system further comprises a central server gateway for all messaging traffic between said portable messaging units and the Internet.

5. The means of claim 1, wherein said messaging system further comprises a central server with means for tracking and billing messaging traffic between said portable messaging units via said messaging nodes.

6. The means of claim 1, wherein said data exchange conducted between said portable messaging units and any network requires that said portable messaging units be physically transported to said immediate proximity of at least one of said messaging nodes.

7. The means of claim 1, wherein the transfer of data between a portable messaging unit within said messaging system and any other type of electronic device requires that said transfer of data be conducted via said data exchange with said messaging node.

8. The means of claim 1, wherein said data exchange is conducted via photonic communications means.

9. The means of claim 1, wherein said data exchange is conducted via supersonic communications means.

10. The means of claim 1, wherein said data exchange is conducted via a temporary data cable.

11. The means of claim 1, wherein said communications means include low power radio transceiver equipment, with a communications range under 100 meters.

12. The means of claim 1, wherein said messaging nodes are geographically distributed in locations accessible to the public.

13. A method for the delivery of an incoming message in a messaging system comprising a plurality of messaging nodes, a plurality of user accounts with distinct

messaging address identifiers, and a plurality of portable messaging units with firmware for controlling messaging operations, said method comprising the steps of:

- a) transporting a portable messaging unit to the immediate proximity of a messaging node;
- b) identifying at least one user account, associated with said portable messaging unit, to said messaging node;
- c) delivering incoming messages for said user account from said messaging node to said portable messaging unit;
- d) storing said incoming message within said portable messaging unit;

whereby incoming messages are delivered to said portable messaging unit with firmware for controlling messaging operations.

14. The method of claim 13, further comprising the step of verifying that said user account has sufficient credit to receive incoming messaging traffic before said incoming message is delivered to said portable messaging unit.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein said messaging system further comprises a central server, and the verification of said sufficient credit is performed by said central server.

16. The method of claim 13, further comprising the step of said messaging node proactively buffering incoming messages for said user account prior to the transport of said portable messaging unit to the immediate proximity of said messaging node.

17. The method of claim 13, further comprising the step of requesting incoming messages by said messaging node for said user account subsequent to the identification of said user account to said messaging node, for immediate delivery to said portable messaging unit.

18. The method of claim 13, wherein said messaging system further comprises a central server, and further comprising the step of requesting incoming messages for said user account by said messaging node from said central server.
19. The method of claim 13, further comprising the step of transferring mail server information, including a username and password for said mail server, from said portable messaging unit to said messaging node; and the step of retrieving said incoming messages from said mail server, prior to the delivery of said incoming messages to said portable messaging unit.
20. The means of claim 13, wherein said data exchange is conducted via photonic communications means.
21. The means of claim 13, wherein said data exchange is conducted via supersonic communications means.
22. The means of claim 13, wherein said data exchange is conducted via a temporary data cable.
23. The means of claim 13, wherein said communications means include low power radio transceiver equipment, with a communications range under 100 meters.
24. The method of claim 13, wherein said incoming message comprises a text message.
25. The method of claim 1, wherein said incoming message is an automated response to an outgoing message previously sent from said user account, where said outgoing message was a request for advanced network functions.
26. The method of claim 25, wherein said advanced network functions comprise network webpage retrieval.

27. A method for the delivery of an outgoing message in a messaging system comprising a plurality of messaging nodes, a plurality of user accounts with distinct messaging address identifiers, and a plurality of portable messaging units with firmware controlling messaging operations, said method comprising the steps of:

- a) composing said outgoing message on a portable messaging unit;
- b) storing said outgoing message within said portable messaging unit;
- c) transporting said portable messaging unit to the immediate proximity of a messaging node;
- d) delivering said outgoing message from said portable messaging unit to said messaging node,
- e) storing said outgoing message within said messaging node;
- f) relaying said outgoing message from said messaging node to a delivery address.

whereby outgoing messages are composed and sent from a portable messaging unit with firmware for controlling messaging operations.

28. The method of claim 27, wherein said messaging system further comprises a central server, and said method further comprises the step of said central server verifying that said user account has sufficient credit to send outgoing messaging traffic before said outgoing message is relayed by said messaging node.

29. The method of claim 27, wherein the delivery of said outgoing message from said portable messaging unit to said messaging node is conducted via photonic communications means.

30. The method of claim 27, wherein the delivery of said outgoing message from said portable messaging unit to said messaging node is conducted via supersonic communications means.

31. The method of claim 27, wherein the delivery of said outgoing message from said portable messaging unit to said messaging node is conducted via photonic communications means.

32. The method of claim 27, wherein the delivery of said outgoing message from said portable messaging unit to said messaging node is conducted via low power radio transceiver equipment, with a communications range under 100 meters.

33. The method of claim 27, wherein said outgoing message comprises a text message.

34. A method for the transfer of data between a portable messaging unit and a messaging node, where said messaging node

- a) detects the presence of a portable messaging unit in an immediate proximity;
- b) automatically enters a data exchange with said portable messaging unit;
- c) identifies at least one user account associated with said portable messaging unit;
- d) triggers the delivery of outgoing messages from said portable messaging node;
- e) identifies incoming messages addressed to user accounts associated with said portable messaging unit;
- f) delivers said incoming messages to said portable messaging unit,

within a messaging system comprising a plurality of messaging nodes and a plurality of portable messaging units with firmware for controlling messaging operations.